

APPROPRIATIONS & 7 OTHERS

Graves goes big on cyber in last days of Appropriations



BY MARTIN MATISHAK | 07/16/2020 05:00 AM EDT



Rep. Tom Graves | Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Rep. [Tom Graves](#) devoted much of his last congressional appropriations cycle to cybersecurity issues, arguing the Covid-19 pandemic has emphasized “how important secure networks and platforms are to our daily lives.”

The Georgia Republican, [who announced his retirement late last year](#), worked roughly a dozen cyber-related provisions into the chamber’s annual spending measures.

“We know that there’s a displaced workforce all across the country, and we’re relying so much on video and technology and all these online platforms,” Graves, the top Republican on the

Financial Services and General Government subpanel, told POLITICO. He said it was "really important to put a lot of focus" on providing reliable networks in the final days of appropriations.

The five-term congressman's provisions — which spanned six of the House Appropriations Committee's subpanels — included requiring a joint report by the State and Defense departments on common NATO standards and protocols for unified responses to digital attacks. Graves said there is currently "a lack of clarity" about what kind of online assault would trigger a response from NATO allies. NATO has recognized cyberspace an area where the alliance must come to the defense of member countries since 2016.

Graves also proposed directing State to maintain an accurate list of its IT assets, establishing a cybersecurity advisory committee to consult with the heads of CISA and DHS and asking the Federal Trade Commission to issue guidelines to promote the use of secure software and hardware for Internet of Things devices and implement a national strategy on 5G.

Graves has been best known in the cyber policy arena as a key proponent of legislation, [H.R. 3270](#), that would partially legalize "hacking back" — allowing companies to venture outside their own networks to identify their hackers, or to retrieve and destroy stolen files.

Supporters say the legislation is necessary in an era where the private sector is pummeled by digital intruders with little ability to fight back. But detractors argue such tactics could backfire, like sparking online skirmishes.

"We've certainly moved the ball down the field and the concept will stay alive," Graves predicted, adding he would continue to advocate for legalizing the practice after he leaves Congress next year. "The problem is not going away and creating additional committees or studies or anything like that — it's really not going to fix it."

Graves said that, overall, the U.S. is doing a good job of handling the "tremendous" challenges of digital security.

"But we're one attack away," he warned.

The 50-year-old Georgian, who also serves as the top Republican on the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress, said the U.S. "can do better" to prepare for the fallout of a devastating cyber strike, especially one that could disrupt the country's economy on a scale similar to the coronavirus.

"We've got to be actively engaged, not passive," Graves said. "Our country has always been very forward-thinking, very aggressive, forward-leaning when it comes to cyber."

On Wednesday the full Appropriations Committee approved the last of its spending measures. House leaders could bundle the various measures for floor passage before the planned August

recess. However, since the Senate hasn't touched any of their appropriations bills, it's more likely that lawmakers will start fiscal 2021 with a continuing resolution.

Graves expressed confidence that his provisions would withstand either process, noting their bipartisan support at the subcommittee level.

Appropriations Committee Chair [Nita Lowey](#) (D-N.Y.), who is also retiring next year, complimented Graves' commitment to shoring up digital defenses.

"While Ranking Member Graves and I do not see eye to eye on every issue, I very much appreciate his hard and thoughtful work on cybersecurity issues," she said in a statement to POLITICO. "Our country's cyber vulnerabilities concern me greatly as well."

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